

Soldiers *Online*

NTC

Turns 20

Story by **SPC Kim Dooley**

THE National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif., which celebrated its 20th anniversary in July, was created to provide enhanced realism for training and a better system of evaluating combat readiness.

“A commander can train on tasks here that he can’t at home station. He can get the kind of feedback that will really help his unit to learn and grow,” said BG James D. Thurman, Fort Irwin and NTC commander.

“For 20 years the NTC has been the place a commander can point to and say: ‘The rotation to the NTC was the training highlight of my battalion command tour.’ I’m proud of that.”

Thurman speaks from experience. Deployed to the NTC three times before taking command here — twice as a brigade commander — Thurman recalled: “In both instances as the commander, I was able to maneuver and train my unit as I would in war. That kind of experience is priceless.”

And that “priceless” training followed him and countless other soldiers into Operation Desert Storm.

While the need for preparedness

has been NTC’s reason for being, it’s the soldiers and civilians assigned to Fort Irwin who have made the NTC mission a success.

The components of the NTC are the Operations Group, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, and the infrastructure and instrumentation of Fort Irwin.

“Operations Group provides the Army feedback mechanisms,” said NTC CSM Steven A. Mohror. “They tell us how our units are performing their missions. This helps the leader to determine what they need to do to improve combat readiness.”

The key components of Operations Group are the observer-controller teams that provide after-action reviews, Mohror said.

Meanwhile, the 11th ACR is the realistic and uncooperative opposing force that challenges each unit that steps onto its “home turf.”

NTC training creates a realistic environment — MILES-equipped soldiers face the possibility of “death”; troops do without food, ammunition and supplies until they can acquire support; small errors lead to defeat.

The post’s infrastructure and instrumentation allow different

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agencies around post to track the training units during “battle.” That data proves a unit’s strengths and weaknesses and helps commanders assess their units and themselves.

Some of the NTC’s near-term transformation plans involve setting up urban-operation sites and attempting to secure a rail spur for the installation.

Urban-operation sites will further integrate what Mohr describes as “urban flavor” to the battlefield, where soldiers are forced to interact with civilians and in settings where civilians will be affected by their actions.

Rail spurs would make it more convenient for training units to transport their own equipment to the NTC and would ease the heavy traffic on the main road into post.

“Our mission will always be the same: to train the force,” Thurman said. “I like to think we are making a contribution to the Army and to the nation. As the Army transforms, so will the NTC.” □



The soldiers of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment provide a first-class opposing force for rotational units that visit the NTC to hone their combat skills.



Welcome to NTC

Story by SGT A.J. Coyne

SOLDIERS who ventured to the National Training Center during its early years might not recognize the sprawling desert outpost today.

While the installation has steadily grown over the past 20 years to its current size of 1,200 square miles, the influx of soldiers and family members has meant constant facility upgrades and improvements.

With more than 2,100 housing units on post, many soldiers stationed at Fort Irwin can live on-post, close to both their families and their jobs. For those families, on-post housing eliminates the need for a daily 30-mile drive from Barstow, Calif., to Fort Irwin.

The road itself is getting a makeover as well. The two-lane hardtop that stretches across the rolling desert landscape sup-

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Soldiers training at the NTC are subjected to a variety of challenges, including having to wear full combat gear — plus MILES — in the California heat.

ports more than 5,000 vehicles per day. A \$12 million project to widen the road was scheduled to begin last month.

On any given day, Fort Irwin's population, including soldiers, family members, civilian employees and rotational soldiers, hovers between 16,000 and 17,000 people, creating the need for a self-sustaining community.

Lewis Elementary School and Fort Irwin

to rotational soldiers, but improvements to the area have added pavement, buildings, concession facilities and phone centers.

Still not an ideal place to live — dust storms occur regularly, eliminating visibility and covering soldiers with fine sand — the RUBA provides a challenging training environment for thousands of soldiers each year. □

About Those Rocks...

WHEN soldiers travel to the National Training Center, they know they've almost reached their destination when they spot "Painted Rocks."

A collection of more than 100 rocks of various shapes and sizes, "Painted Rocks" provides visitors and newcomers a look back in time at the various units that have trained at Fort Irwin and NTC.

The rocks, adorned with the crests, slogans and logos of units from throughout the Army, first began appearing in the early 1960s, said Neil Morrison, curator of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment Museum.

The original group of rocks included about 100 paintings and has grown steadily ever since. The increasing number of paintings has led to a shortage of rocks, and units must now contact Fort Irwin Range Control to get permission to move a new rock to the Painted Rocks location. Range Control personnel say about four new rocks are added each rotation.

There was no policy to protect the rocks until 1996, so some of the older, original paintings were painted over by new units looking to leave their mark in the desert.

But now that the painting and placing of rocks are regulated, visitors to NTC can be sure their contribution to NTC history will last as long as the wind and sand allow. — SGT A.J. Coyne

Middle School employ 80 teachers who educate nearly 1,400 children, and the post has a new child-development center.

"The Landmark Inn" recently opened on post, and its 180 rooms are frequently filled.

But the area most soldiers know best is referred to as the "Dust Bowl." In the past, the Rotational Unit Bivouac Area was an open, desert-covered community where high winds kicked up clouds of sand and dust on a daily basis.

The "Dust Bowl" is still home to rotational soldiers, but improvements to the area have added pavement, buildings, concession facilities and phone centers.

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Troops of the NTC's opposing force keep a close watch on visiting units throughout their training rotations.